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LETTER DATED 15 FEBRUARY 1996 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF IRAQ TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

On instructions from my Government, and with reference to the letter from the Permanent Representative of the United States of America dated 24 January 1996 (S/1996/63), relating to the interception and inspection of the vessel Michael-R by United States naval forces, I wish to shed further light on the misleading allegations and false justifications in the letter, which do not accord with the facts.

1. The second paragraph of the letter states that contrary to what was stated by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iraq in the letter which he addressed to the President of the Security Council, the vessel was not inspected by the United States Navy but by United States naval forces, whereas the letter from the Minister for Foreign Affairs does not refer to the United States Navy, but indicates that interception and inspection of the vessel was carried out by forces of the United States Navy. It is a fact that it was indeed United States naval forces which intercepted and inspected the vessel, and not other naval forces of any other nationality.

2. The Permanent Representative of the United States, in the third paragraph of her letter, claims that the vessel was not forced to proceed to Bahrain and that United States naval forces inspectors initially found that the cargo was inaccessible and could not be safely inspected, and that the vessel was allowed to proceed directly to its destination after only a brief delay. In fact the commander of the vessel advised the Basra port authorities that United States naval forces, after having intercepted the vessel in the Arabian Gulf, told him, on 23 December at 4 p.m., to proceed to Bahrain for a second inspection.

3. In the fourth paragraph, the Permanent Representative of the United States claims that inspection must be such as to expedite the passage of authorized cargoes to their destinations. In fact this vessel, chartered on behalf of the World Food Programme, a United Nations agency, had all the

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* Reissued for technical reasons.

necessary official documentation issued by the United Nations. As a result of its interception by United States naval forces, the vessel, which was to have reached the port of Umm Qasr (Basra) on 23 December 1995, did not in fact arrive until 1 January 1996, after wearisome efforts by World Food Programme officials to secure its release. In such circumstances how can a delay of nine days be termed a brief delay, as claimed by the United States Permanent Representative? Moreover, this delay subjected the commander of the vessel and his crew to severe hardship, their only wrong being to transport a humanitarian cargo, authenticated by official documentation issued by the United Nations.

4. The World Food Programme and all those who have followed this affair are aware of the truth. The incident demonstrates once again that the United States wishes to tighten the total embargo imposed on the Iraqi people in the context of a genocidal war with hidden aims which bear no relation to the resolutions and Charter of the United Nations.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Nizar HAMDOON
Ambassador
Permanent Representative